



**THOMAS L. GARTHWAITE, M.D.**  
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February 2, 2004

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D.  
Director and Chief Medical Officer

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Thomas L. Garthwaite", is written over the printed name and title.

SUBJECT: **CLOSURE OF SANTA TERESITA HOSPITAL**

On January 6, 2004, Santa Teresita Hospital, Inc. (STH) notified the Department of Health Services' Health Facilities Division of the imminent closure of their emergency department (ED) effective January 9, 2004. The letter requested that STH's medical-surgical, intensive care and perinatal beds be placed in suspense. In the letter STH indicated its intent to keep its Skilled Nursing beds in service, but to close its acute beds no later than February 6, 2004. The letter cited declining reimbursements and its inability to meet the new State-mandated nurse staffing ratios as the reasons for the closure of the ED and general acute care beds.

The Los Angeles County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Agency was immediately informed of the closure notice. The EMS Agency subsequently provided written notification to all the paramedic provider agencies and 9-1-1 receiving hospitals that would be affected by the impending closure. Representatives from the EMS Agency and the Health Facilities Inspection Division also conducted a site visit at STH on Friday, January 9, 2004 to discuss and evaluate the closure with the hospital's representatives. In addition, the EMS Agency has met with the administration of Methodist Hospital of Southern California, a facility that reported an immediate negative impact from the STH ED closure.

The Health and Safety Code requires a hospital to provide notice of a planned intention to reduce or eliminate emergency services as soon as possible, but no later than 90 days. The notification must allow sufficient time for a public hearing and written impact evaluation of the closure upon the community, including community access to

emergency care, and how the closure will affect emergency services provided by other entities. Like the Health and Safety Code, Los Angeles County Prehospital Policy also states that the notice must go to "all health care plans or other entities under contract with the hospital that provides services to enrollees". A hospital is also required to provide public notice of the intended change "in a manner that is likely to reach a significant number of residents of the community" including advertising, soliciting media coverage, informing patients and notifying contracting health care service plans. Based on the limited notice of closure, County Counsel has determined that the Public Hearing and EMS Impact Evaluation, as defined in the California Health and Safety Code Section 1300, does not apply in this instance.

The EMS Agency has prepared an Impact Evaluation Report outlining the impact of this closure on the EMS system (attached). Nearby EDs, whose patient census already exceed the established standard of 1800 patient visits per treatment bay, are experiencing an increased number of patients. The Los Angeles County, Monrovia, and San Marino Fire Departments report that the hospital's closure has negatively impacted their prehospital care operations and 9-1-1 response times by increasing transport times to alternate EDs and delaying EMS personnel as they wait to transfer patient care to hospital staff.

DHS has determined that STH failed to comply with the law and County policy. Even more egregiously, it failed to notify its patients, its community, and even its own staff members of the intended closure in the manner required by law. Within 30 days the EMS Agency, in conjunction with Health Facilities Inspection Division will be sending out a letter to all hospitals in Los Angeles County regarding statutory notification requirements of a planned closure of an ED. The Health Facilities Inspection Division is reviewing the hospital's failure to provide proper closure notice as well as other related licensing issues. In addition, allegations regarding insufficient physician resources prior to Santa Teresita's closure of the General Acute Care beds will be reviewed.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please let me know.

TG:cb  
401:013

#### Attachments

c: Chief Administrative Officer  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
Director, EMS Agency  
EMS Commission